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THE VALLEY OF LOVE

BY

WILLIAM LEE POPHAM.

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The Valley of Love.

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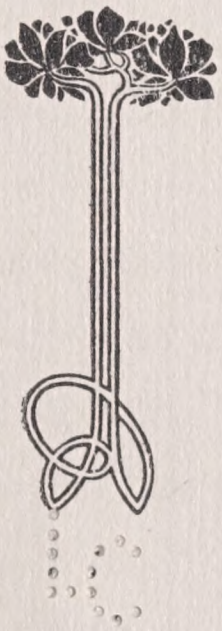

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WILLIAM LEE POPHAM

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THE AUTHOR'S OTHER BOOKS.

"Poems of Truth, Love and Power."
"Silver Gems in Seas of Gold."
"Nut Shells of Truth."
"Love's Rainbow Dream."
"She Dared to Win."
"A Tramp's Love."
"The Village by the Sea."

The Valley of Love.

BY

WILLIAM LEE POPHAM

Reader, did you ever visit the mountains of Kentucky where the white oaks salute heaven and where the laughing waters flow down the valley a-singing on their journey toward the distant sea?

"The Kentucky mountains for my vacation," said Cleveland Wilmore, the author, "for 'tis there where I shall find both rest and pleasure." "Going to finish your new book while you're close to Nature's heart, I suppose?" said a friend at the depot. The author answered by opening his grip, which

revealed a bunch of writing tablets and pencils, remarking: "This looks like the promise of an author's pen, does it not?"

The next moment Cleveland Wilmore was seated in the parlor car while the train rolled slowly away from the Union Station. After the city limits were left far behind, the conductor, a jolly friend of the author, took a ticket from Wilmore's hand which showed the destination to be Somerset, a small, beautiful city near the Kentucky mountains.

Cleveland Wilmore's ticket was the last one to be collected from the city passengers and this gave the conductor a good chance to linger with the author in conversation.

"What's the attraction at Somerset?" asked the conductor, smiling.

"Off for the mountains," an-

swered Wilmore, "for pleasure, work and rest."

"A queer combination," responded the conductor, "but I guess the 'pleasure' will be at Somerset?"

"Nothing for me at Somerset," answered Wilmore.

"What about your friend, Madge Ross?" inquired the conductor.

Wilmore laughed heartily, saying, "You have picked the wrong one; it is her chum, Una Nelson, whom I admire."

"Admire is a queer name for love," joked the conductor.

"You are too wise," answered Wilmore. "How came you to know so much?"

"Why, boy, I've known those girls since they were children," responded the conductor, "and both often ask of you, knowing that I am an old friend of your father."

"I believe you stop at their uncle's inn," said Wilmore, "where they spend much of their time?"

"Yes, I'm wiser than you know; while I don't know which one you favor, I do know that both girls love you."

"Do you think so?" questioned the author, looking anxious.

"I know so," responded the conductor.

"I thought Madge was in love with a young doctor," said Wilmore.

"She once admired a young doctor who lived in the city," responded the conductor, "but she only treats him as a friend since she met you."

"How do you know?" asked Wilmore.

"Why, she seems like my own sister," answered the conductor,

"and confides in me as she would her brother."

"Then I'm glad to listen to you," said Wilmore. "Proceed."

"At one time she might have been won by the young doctor, but you know," continued the conductor, "that her ambition is higher than to join life with a young physician whose reputation is yet unmade, and, besides, she likes travel, desires to see the world and her tastes run along literary lines."

"Yes; I believe you know her nature," said Wilmore, "but I most like her chum, Una Nelson, the little girl with brown eyes and auburn hair."

"Miss Nelson is a fine girl," encouraged the conductor, "and her parents are among the best people the 'bluegrass belt' can afford."

"It would be a source of pleasure

to know that she admires me," mused the author.

"If she doesn't love you, my friend, I can not judge human nature," said the conductor as he arose to assist some passengers at the station.

At this point Cleveland Wilmore was left in his seat alone and his thoughts resembled a dream. There were no passengers in the end of the parlor car where the young man sat, and while the cars flew by the fertile fields like a bird, an author's brains were engrossed in thought.

"I regret that I ever cultivated the acquaintance of Madge Ross," thought Wilmore, "for the young doctor is perfectly welcome to her as far as I am concerned."

Cleveland Wilmore was at a loss to know how to call at the inn where the two girls lived—to evade the

one and court the other. This was his desire, for he thought that he admired Una more than Madge. Six hours later the conductor came to the parlor car and called out: "Somerset the next stop!" while the author breathed a sigh of relief.

After Cleveland Wilmore had arrived in the beautiful mountain town, he wrote a letter to the one at the inn he most admired, which read in part as follows:

"Somerset Ky.

"Miss Una Nelson, City.

"Dear Miss Nelson: I have just arrived and would like to see you before leaving for the mountains.

"If agreeable, please inform me where and when to call.

Very truly yours,

Cleveland Wilmore."

When Una received the note she answered it at once as follows:

"Mr. Cleveland Wilmore,
City.

"Dear Friend: I gladly await your call in my parlor at 8 o'clock this evening.

Respectfully,
Una Nelson.

Care 'The Inn,' Somerset, Ky."

Cleveland Wilmore had corresponded in the "post-card fashion" with both Una Nelson and Madge Ross, and had proven to be a true friend to each. Although his desire at this time was to pay attention to Una, yet when he was with the two girls together, he hardly knew whom he most admired.

Una and Madge were cousins and had come from their beautiful country homes to their uncle's inn, in Somerset, where they could enjoy the advantages of college life and city environments. Soon as Una

answered the author's letter accepting his call, she went to Madge's room delighted, to break the news. Madge read the missive Wilmore had written her cousin and dropped her eyes as in deep study. It was a half minute before Madge spoke, while Una expressed her pleasant anticipation of his promised call.

"He might have sent me a greeting, anyway," was the first sentence Madge uttered.

"Maybe he prefers to greet you face to face," encouraged Una.

"I shall not come in the parlor tonight," replied Madge, "unless he sends for me." With these words, Madge left Una alone in the room and went into a vacant room in the corner of the building.

"Cousin Madge envies my pleasure in entertaining the author," said Una to herself. Una's curios-

ity was aroused and she went to the door of the vacant room where Madge had just gone and peeped thru the key-hole.

"Perhaps this is wrong," said Una's conscience to her better self, "but I must have one peep," she thought.

"Poor girl!" sighed Una to herself, as she put her eye to the key-hole. Madge was lying across the bed with her face downward, crying.

"She loves him, too," thought Una.

This scene mixed sadness with Una's joy, and before going into the parlor where she was to entertain Cleveland Wilmore that evening, she crossed to the parlor library and sought some of Wilmore's books, gazed at his picture, and read from his skilled pen, until

Madge came into the library where Una was seated. Her usually beautiful eyes showed that more than a surprise had been wrought by Wilmore's note to Una. They showed that p a i n and disappointment lurked within her pure soul, and that she was miserable. Una saw this in an instant, and was at a loss to express herself. She was afraid to offer sympathy, although she longed to.

While they had been life-long friends and loved each other, not only by the tie of kindred, but by a stolid happy companionship, still in this sudden awakening, they seemed but strangers.

But soon the piano keys were busy, and two feminine voices were singing as though the whole world was a blossom of joy, seemingly forgetting the afternoon's experience and the evening's anticipation.

CHAPTER II.

Eight o'clock found Cleveland Wilmore in the beautiful inn parlor with Una Nelson—and soon, at the author's request, they were joined by Madge Ross.

Una wore a single white rose at her throat, giving touch to the simple frock which she wore, while Madge wore a cluster of dainty violets, nestling in the folds of the soft gown, showing a radiance, beautiful to behold.

"Faithfulness," Madge had whispered as she fastened the violets there.

"But he does not care for my faithfulness now."

Both girls were beautiful and talked freely. The caller showed no more courtesy to one than the other

and the evening was pleasantly spent in poetry, music, song, story and conversation.

The next afternoon, before leaving for the solitude of the picturesque mountains, the author called at the inn and took both Una and Madge for a pleasant drive.

CHAPTER III.

At the small railroad station in the mountains Cleveland Wilmore was met by many friends and inquiring strangers. The people shook his hand like he had been an honored politician just elected to some great office of trust and responsibility.

Indeed, the reception accorded him was in the mountain style. Ox wagons stood around the station, while buggies, wagons and saddled horses were thick along the rocky roadside.

Although the place the author had chosen to rest and write, as well as to fish and hunt, was in the feud center of the Kentucky mountains, the natives received him kindly and opened their homes in welcome to the city guest. His close friends

had previously advised him to take no sides regarding the feuds which have given the Kentucky mountains their "bad name"—and the author was master of the situation. While the mission of his visit was generally known to be one of harmony and pleasure, a few of the "mountain fellows" were "suspicious."

Some imagined him to be a revenue officer, some a detective, others thought he might be a "feud peacemaker," while others believed him to be a "coal hunter." In some parts of the mountains are operated large coal mines, and it is thought that many undiscovered mines might be slumbering in the mountain's fertile bosom. Wilmore was not surprised to find the men carrying revolvers in their belts. Indeed, the "Colts" were quite in the fashion.

Soon the kind author's mission was understood by all, and if there was any inharmony among the natives on the author's account, it was because he couldn't visit "everybody's" home at the same time. At no place in the world is there more hospitality than in the mountains of Kentucky. The log houses are low and small, but love and loyalty are within. The cabins are unpainted, the doors swing on wooden hinges and the "fire place" is immense. But the "latch string" hangs on the outside and the stool chairs are always ready to rest the "tired bones" of a weary traveler.

The author was a man of power and personality. His clear, expressive eyes were mirrors of a noble soul and a warm heart.

His hand clasp made one feel the thrill of his love for his fellow-man

—and his writings were known by millions to be soothing balm for struggling humanity.

To be with him was to admire him and to read the beautiful flow from his pen was to love him.

His very nature was love. He had a "great time with the boys," as he often expressed it, and both boys and girls looked upon the visitor as "some strange being full of brains, love and kindness."

The author was often amused at the queer ways of the mountain natives. When the girls "dressed up" they wore blue, red, pink or "striped calico."

The boys wore black and tan jeans and coarse brogan shoes.

"Stranger," said a large, 'double-fisted' man to the author, "we've fixed up the cabin fur ye to-night." "We killed a buck, some

squirrels and a pig; and Bob—that's Sally's feller—is going to bring us some fish he ketched last night. And stranger, ye is jist mor' an welcome to it all, sich as it is. The gals and boys from the hollow will be thar with their banjos and fiddles and make music sich as ye never hearn before."

The author shook the native's big hand heartily and said: "Friend, tell them I'll be on hand, and that I will show them how a city chap can eat fish and enjoy a good time."

Enough to say that Wilmore was on hand and actually enjoyed it all.

In response to requests, the author read several pieces from one of his books and the natives listened as tho' it were from an angel.

"It's blasted strange," said the mother of fourteen children, "how ye kin write them thar books."

CHAPTER IV.

The next morning, after a hearty breakfast, Cleveland Wilmore "took for the woods," as one of the girls expressed it.

He swung into the road with a whistle and walked with a free, easy stride that was somehow suggestive of reserve strength and power, down the long slope of the hill. The maples crowded thickly the roadside on either hand and beneath them were beds of tender green, curly young ferns. Here and there a wild plum hung out its feathery bloom like a banner of springtime. The air was fragrant and balmy with wandering breezes. Now and then Wilmore met some sallow lad on horseback or a shrewd-faced farmer on a cart, who

nodded and called out cheerily, "Howdy, Stranger?"

Below the hill he could hear the rippling of the brook—and across the woodland dell he heard the yell of the cowboys.

The creek road ran back into solitudes of woods and wild pastures.

No pen can describe an author's soul, for God alone knows the inner thought.

Cleveland Wilmore did not fail to feel and appreciate the lavish painting of the hand of God. To him nature never bloomed in vain. The green wood in which he finally found himself was pierced with arrows of ruby light from the golden sun.

Walking up a long purple isle—with his soul full of nature's music, he sat down on a moss-covered rock and began to write for his new book.

"It takes love and nature to bring masterpieces from an author's soul," thought he. And surely no scene could excel the mountain solitude where he sat. Wild flowers of many kinds and colors nodded around him as if they knew that "flowers afforded inspiration for a poet's dream." Their penetrating, haunting fragrance distilled on the sightless wings of the air and met him on every puff of wind, no matter where he sat or walked. In the very center of a wild garden of violets was a clump of blue forget-me-nots. The corners of the garden were gay with thickly-growing yellow daffodils. Along the southern side grew a hedge of lilac trees and just inside the gap by which he had entered was a tall poplar. Eastward there were several branching

bird cherries snowy with bloom; and everywhere, as it seemed, grew clumps of "bleeding hearts," tremulous with spikes of rosy flowers. There were many wild rose bushes also, but it was too early in the season for roses.

"I could fall asleep here and dream things almost too sacred for heaven," he thought.

Across the mellow stillness, mingled with the croon of the wind in the trees and the calls of the robins, came a strain of delicious music, so beautiful and fantastic that he held his breath in astonishment and delight. Was he dreaming? No; it was real music, the music of a violin played by some hand inspired with the very spirit of harmony. He had never heard anything like it, and he felt quite sure that nothing exactly like it *had* been heard

before—that the wonderful music was coming straight from the soul of the unseen violinist and translating itself so into those most airy and delicate of sounds for the first time. It was an elusive, haunting melody, strangely suited to the time and place, and had in it the sigh of the wind in the spruce pines, the whispering of the grasses at dewfall, the white thoughts of the lilies —and all the soul of the old laughter and song and tears and gladness and sobs the mountains had ever known in the lost years; and besides all this there was a pitiful, plaintive cry, as of some imprisoned thing calling for freedom, for utterance.

Enchanted with the music and anxious to find from whence it came, he arose and walked gently toward

the brook and at last saw the music's fair authoress.

On the stone bench under the big, spreading maples, sat a mountain-bred girl beside her lover. There she held the violin in her slender fingers while their feet dangled from the moss-covered rock and nearly touched the rippling brook below.

"I would not interrupt them for the world," Wilmore thought as he turned to go back to his former resting place.

Then an inspiration possessed him, while his pen flowed freely; and such beautiful thoughts that filled the lines of his writing tablet. Each day the author rambled amidst the mountain scenes and added to his new book. One of the author's favorite resting places was in a grape vine hammock by the

public road just above the ford of the creek and often the passing natives would stop and ask him to read aloud from his new book.

And rarely did he refuse to read something, for he desired to show his appreciation for the many kindnesses shown him at the hands of a people whom he once thought "killed every stranger for a revenue officer or a feud peacemaker." It is true that at that time the feud spirit still lived in the hearts of many natives—and that "moonshine" stills turned out many a gallon of "mountain dew" in the stillness of night—in caves or under sloping cliffs—where no voice of man dared make an echo.

But the lips of Cleveland Wilmore did not thirst for the "mountain dew," nor did he express his

opinions on either side regarding any feud.

Neither did he care to visit the stills—but one cloudy morning he found one accidentally. They had just "turned off" a "big run" the night before, and the operators were busy filling many large jugs of the profitable product. The author was in twenty yards of the still before he saw it. Wilmore saw a scattering smoke ascending, several buckets and jugs sitting by a barrel and heard a low, rumbling sound of coarse voices. His heart leaped to his throat, for he at once realized it was death to him if they mistook him for a revenue officer. What could he do? Must he run, stand or go up to where the men were working?

"I must do something, and that quickly!" thought Wilmore. Then

he yelled out: "Hello, fellows! this is the author and I am your friend."

The author spoke this, standing perfectly still. In an instant eight large, rough men arose with drawn revolvers, pointed at Wilmore's head. Each of the eight men held two revolvers—one in each hand.

"Who be ye?" demanded a coarse voice.

"Why, I'm the author," said the victim, mildly.

"He said he was the 'officer,'" said one of the eight men. "Then we'll shoot!" said another. "For God's sake wait!" cried Wilmore. "I said that I was the author, not an officer. I'm the man who is writing the new book."

"Well, say a poem," said one, "if it be ye."

"Say it quick!" persisted a voice.

What could the author recall to

mind then and there? What a trying time for one so frightened!

Then the author forced out a laugh and said, "Why, fellows, I read to you last night from my new book."

Then the following silly rhyme came to his mind like a flash, and he recited loud and clear:

"I'm innocent as a lamb,
And full of fun;
Scared to death,
And afraid to run."

Then the guns were dropped and the whole crowd laughed.

Silly as seems the rhyme, it expressed Wilmore's feeling and accomplished the desired result to make peace with the rough men who might have harmed him.

CHAPTER V.

Each day Cleveland Wilmore was found after mail time at the post-office—which was a small box in one corner of the storeroom, with small partitions across each way where the letters were placed. Each day his mail nearly filled a whole box, and the rosy-cheeked postmistress of eighteen years placed his mail in one corner to itself.

The author had written a card addressed to Madge Ross and Una Nelson at Somerset, inviting them to join him in the mountains for a few days before he returned to the city. In his invitation he promised them a good time at horseback riding, fishing and kodaking. When the card reached its destination, Una had gone to spend a week at her country home and Madge re-

ceived the invitation with great joy.

"My prayers are answered," she said to herself, as she climbed into the two-horse stage which was bound for the mountains. She had just written Wilmore a letter stating that she would arrive on the afternoon stage.

Cleveland Wilmore scanned his morning mail at the postoffice and came to the letter from Madge. To his surprise, it read as follows:

"Dear Mr. Wilmore: Your kind invitation to join you in the mountains just received. Una is visiting her country home this week and I am so lonely. I will not say that I coming alone on your invitation, but I have decided to pay a long-promised visit to Jake Carter, our good mountain friend, who has called weekly at uncle's inn for four years with his poultry wagon. He

is a kind old gentlemen and has persuaded me to visit his mountain home. I have met his wife and daughter and they also asked me to come. So I will arrive on the afternoon stage on Tuesday of this week, and hope to see you soon.

Cordially yours,

Madge Ross."

Cleveland Wilmore folded the letter with a sigh, while his thoughts acted quickly.

"My ill luck!" thought he, "that Una can't come." Yet he was half glad even to have Madge come and cheer his melancholy soul.

Was he melancholy? Yes; for the first time in two weeks.

"Well, I'll meet Madge," promised Wilmore to himself, "and treat her kindly and try to show her a good time."

Madge Ross had a long, tiresome

trip, and for a time enjoyed the scene on either side of the mountain road immensely. At times she could see from the tall hilltops for miles across the deep green valleys. But she quite forgot the scenery and busied herself in thought.

"Will Mr. Wilmore think I'm too hasty? she thought.

"He can't think ill of me," she consoled herself, "for I took the pains to let him know that I was visiting my friends."

Madge arrived on schedule time and was met at the stage by Wilmore.

Each seemed glad to see the other and soon plans were made to enjoy the mountain recreation together, at least for a time.

Jake Carter, the poultry peddler, and Madge's friend, also met the fair visitor at the stage and took

her direct to his home in a buggy.

"How delightfully it all planned out," thought Madge, almost overjoyed.

Each afternoon after Madge's arrival at Jake Carter's home, Cleveland Wilmore walked with her in the pretty woodland dell where a few days before he had finished his new book. They could often be seen in the grape vine hammock at the public road crossing above the ford of the creek, where the author had read many poems of love to the passing natives a few days before.

"The natives think we are lovers," said Wilmore to Madge, one afternoon as they sat together in the grape-vine hammock.

"How can they tell?" asked Madge, blushing.

The author smiled. "Why, I read them some poems on love at

this same place, several afternoons and now, they think that you are their inspiration,'' responded Wilmore.

Madge hung her head in silence.

''What should I say next?'' she thought. ''Did he not approach the subject himself?''

Silence prevailed for a moment.

''What are you thinking of,'' asked Wilmore.

''Because,'' answered Madge.

''Because!'' exclaimed the author. ''What a queer answer to my question.''

''Did you not ask me why I was silent,'' said Madge excitedly.

''No, little girl,'' said he, ''I asked what you were thinking of?''

''Oh!'' exclaimed Madge, embarrassed. Soon the conversation led off in discussion of the surrounding

scenes and the moments passed swiftly.

When Madge again sat with the Carter family at night, "Jake" asked the fair visitor where she and the author had rambled during the afternoon. She tried to describe the place, but knew no name to call it.

"Oh, you mean 'the valley of love'?" asked Jake.

Madge blushed.

"Where did it get its name?" asked Madge.

"Why, there was where the author wrote them poems on love, and since then we call it 'The Valley of Love.'"

"How queer!" responded the girl.

Soon Madge Ross and Cleveland Wilmore left the mountains together for Somerset, where Madge

remained at her uncle's inn, while Wilmore left for his home in Lexington—a beautiful Kentucky city in the "bluegrass belt." Before the author left the mountains, however, he wrote a poem at the request of his mountain friends, entitled, "The Valley of Love," which, after he had left, was framed and placed at the postoffice where it could be read by the public. There are but few people who frequent that small postoffice in the Kentucky mountains who have not memorized every stanza of the poem. Some of the verses are hereby printed as follows:

THE VALLEY OF LOVE.

There is a place of solitude
  Bedecked with many a stone—
Where lovers long to ramble
  Across the dell alone.

THE VALLEY OF LOVE

The nightingale is singing
With the cooing dove—
And the brook is babbling
In the valley of love.

There is a land of maples
Where vines hug the mountain—
And where the winding streams
Make a crystal fountain.
There is a dell of flowers
Where strife is on the wane—
And the lovers wander
Thru the lover's lane.

There is a shady woodland
Where troubles seldom brew—
Where the mountain natives
To friends are kind and true.
And here is sweet contentment
Where mountains tower above
The winding river's bank
In the quiet valley of love.

Since Cleveland Wilmore's visit

to the mountains, this particular woodland dell is known by all as "The Valley of Love," and many are the days when lovers wander along the cool moss-bordered cliffs and winding mountain streams and repeat to each other the author's love poem, which was born in the solitude of those beautiful scenes.

CHAPTER VI.

The author's visit was long to be remembered by both girls, for it left a queer mystery as to which one of the two he really loved best.

Una was disappointed that she had left the inn the week she might have joined the author with Madge in the mountains, and for days she exclaimed to herself, "Cruel fate! Cruel fate!"

Indeed, it was too late to recall lost opportunity, for Madge had failed to even tell Una of the author's invitation to join him in the mountains until several hours after she returned from visiting her country home.

This caused envy, strife and jealousy between Una and Madge, and for weeks they had but little to do with each other. However, time

healed their wounded feelings and they became friendly again. The author wrote them a letter occasionally—but not separately. He would address the letters to both the girls and request the cousins to consider them "partnership letters." He showed no partiality to either and would even address the envelope to the "Misses Ross and Nelson, care of the Inn."

The girls answered the author in the same way. Una's disposition was quiet and reserved, while Madge's disposition was just the opposite.

The author admired Una most, but neither of the girls knew it.

Madge was a shrewd, winsome girl, with expressive black eyes and dark hair. Her complexion was fair as a lily and a pink flush shone in her cheeks. Her teeth were like

a row of pearls, set in velvet red. The author had unconsciously won the love of both girls, yet never would they confess to each other that they loved him.

Una had no correspondent except the author, and she hardly considered him a correspondent, as he wrote to them both in the same letter, and then only occasionally.

But Madge corresponded with a young doctor from the city, and Una did everything in her power to aid the doctor in winning her.

It was a pleasant morning when the two fair cousins sat by the eastern parlor window looking out upon a rich bed of violets and pansies. The postman opened the gate and Una ran to get the letter. She tossed the letter into Madge's lap, saying, "here is a prescription from the medicine man."

Madge took the joke good naturedly and hastened to open the letter.

"What's the news" asked Una of Madge, after the letter was read.

"He wants to call next Sunday," said Madge.

"Going to let him come, of course?" questioned Una.

"It's of no use," responded Madge.

"You're mean," spoke Una, "don't you love him any more?"

"Why should I?" asked Madge.

"Why, he would make you a good husband," said Una, smiling.

"Never!" said Madge, earnestly.

"Does she love Mr. Wilmore the best?" Una wondered.

"Why could you never be a doctor's wife?" asked Una.

"Simply because I don't love him is the first reason," answered

Madge, "and then he is hardly more than a student—without practice and can not promise a girl more than ordinary opportunities."

"What do you mean by ordinary opportunities?" asked Una.

"His name would perhaps never even find its way to printed pages," responded Madge, "and then a doctor's wife must stay at home when she fain would travel amidst the wonders of the world in the realm of bliss."

"Oh, you have high ideas," said Una.

"Better have a high aim and never reach it," responded Madge, "than live my life away with some one whom I can never love."

The morning passed quickly and the girls were together no more during the day. When evening

came Una lay awake in her room thinking.

" 'Tis no use to hope for the doctor," thought she, "for Madge has made up her mind to win Cleveland Wilmore."

This thought pained her. Madge also lay awake planning shrewdly.

"I'm tired of Wilmore's partnership correspondence," thought Madge.

"If I can't receive individual letters from him, I'll give up the game. I'll simply answer his last letter individually," she decided, "and see if he will return the same."

This she did, but strictly kept the secret from Una.

"Next is to get a private post-office box," decided Madge in her shrewdness. Madge Ross carried

out her plan and the author answered each letter courteously.

In a few months the author and Madge exchanged photographs and corresponded regularly.

"She's a beautiful girl," thought Cleveland Wilmore, on the morning he received Madge's picture. He stood it on the center table in his room, then took it his hand again.

"Beautiful!" he exclaimed again. Then he thought of her expressive black eyes, wavy dark hair and lily complexion. He also thought of the human roses which adorned her cheeks. "And she loves me," he said to himself.

"Should I return her love?" he thought as he sat the picture back again.

Then he thought of Una, to whom he had long since neglected to write.

Yet, in spite of himself, Madge had charmed him with her devoted letters and beautiful photograph. Then she had seen him occasionally since the "mountain ramble," and each time he showed her more consideration.

CHAPTER VII.

It was late autumn when Cleveland Wilmore returned from his New York publishing house to his home in Lexington. The Wilmore family was glad to welcome the favorite son and he talked freely to them of his successful trip.

"I was offered two thousand dollars for the manuscript of my new book," said the author to the family.

"Did you sell it?" asked the father, anxiously.

"No," responded the young author. "It's worth many times that amount to me. The book stores will sell the book for $1.50," figured the author, "and I can furnish it to the stores for 90c per copy in lots of 500."

"That's encouraging," said the father.

"Cleveland, a letter came for you several days ago and we neglected to forward it." Saying this, the mother handed to her son the letter showing the postmark of Somerset.

"Madge has changed her way of writing," thought the man, as he tore it open. Glancing at the last page, he read, "Una."

After reading it, he dropped a tear and sighed noticeably.

"What is it dear?" asked his mother, sympathetically.

"Read it," said the son as he handed his mother the letter, and Mrs. Wilmore read it in a soft, clear tone:

"Mr. Cleveland Wilmore,

Lexington, Ky.

Honored Sir and Friend: Doubtless you will be surprised to get a

letter from one you have so neglected, but please pardon me. I now lay on my bed and the doctors say I must die of tuberculosis not later than the falling of the autumn leaves. I am fully aware of the fact and thus I address you now—for my time is short. Cleveland, I have loved you since we first met, and I am now free to confess it. Yet I ask not your love, for heaven is ready to receive me where there are no sighs, tears nor death. I ask but one thing of any one before I die, and that is just one talk with you at my bedside.

Won't you please come before I get too weak to see you?

Cousin Madge is now by my side, and by her postscript you will see that she joins me in my request.

Affectionately,

Una."

"P. S.—Dear Mr. Wilmore:

Una is growing weaker each day, and must see you, if at all, at once. I hope you'll come. Madge."

When the letter was read, every eye in the room shone of tears.

"I will go to-morrow," said Wilmore, as he dried his eyes.

"You must," joined the father and mother in one voice.

The next morning he started for Somerset and soon stood by Una's bedside.

The same day the author arrived, the sick girl's parents left for their country home for a short rest—for they thought that Una was much better.

Madge nursed Una from the first day she took to her bed, and her exhaustless kindness, care and patience to the sick one was the comment of all who knew them.

Arriving at the Inn Wilmore was met by Madge and escorted to the sick room at once.

"She is most too weak to talk now," said Madge to Wilmore, as they passed thru the hall.

"Tell me all," asked the author of Madge, as he halted in the large hall.

"There is no time for delay!" responded Madge, with a distressed look, "she must see you at once!"

The man hastened to the bed where Una lay while Madge stood by his side. Una recognized him with a smile as she extended her hand. He held her pale, white hand a moment and kissed it tenderly.

"I'm so glad you are here," said Una in a weak voice, "for tomorrow would be too late."

"I'm glad to be here," sighed the tender-hearted man.

"Please sit here," requested Una, as she pointed close to her breast. Wilmore sat upon the bed beside her. He took her hand in his.

"I am dying," she said softly, "and have one request to make before heaven claims its own."

"It shall be granted, if possible," said Wilmore tenderly.

"I want you to promise me here and now to make Cousin Madge your wife," said Una, growing weaker. He held her hand more tightly. Cleveland Wilmore looked at Madge, who stood close by in tears—and hesitated.

Then he looked again at Una. "Won't you please promise me quickly?" whispered the dying girl, "and let me die happy?"

The author looked into Madge's tearful face.

"Madge, do you love me?"

"Yes," answered Madge between a smile and a sigh.

Wilmore looked again upon the wishful face of the dying girl and saw that she was sinking lowly into death.

"'Will you promise?" she pleaded.

"Yes," said Wilmore. "I promise to make Madge Ross my wife," and here the noble-hearted author again kissed Una's hand, as he wept visibly.

Una smiled a look of relief, and motioned for Madge.

Madge came closer, quickly.

"Will you promise to always be true to Cleveland?" asked Una, sinking rapidly.

"Yes," answered Madge, with a sob.

"Then good-bye," whispered the

dying girl. "May God protect and bless your lives."

She opened her eyes again and said: "Jesus has come; meet me in heaven," and thus she passed away into the spirit world to join the angels. Una was a beautiful corpse, yet it was a sad and pathetic scene. She folded her own hands across her white bosom and a contented smile of sweet peace remained upon her face, in death. Her long auburn hair lay in bushy locks around her still head and the ends lay tangled upon the white pillow. Una Nelson was buried according to her request, in the family graveyard upon the hill, and her grave is a green mound of moss and flowers—while a white marble stone bearing her name marks the body's last resting place.

Madge Ross' name is now that

of Mrs. Cleveland Wilmore, and many are the days when the happy couple visit Una's grave, where they sprinkle the mossy mound with fresh water and leave fresh cut flowers to beautify the lonely spot where sleeps the body of the one who brought them together by her bedside when life was ebbing away.

Often Cleveland Wilmore and his happy wife visit the picturesque mountains where they rambled in days gone by, and their hearts sing for joy in the solitude of "The Valley of Love."

The young doctor whom Madge rejected has long since married a woman of his own sphere, and three children live to bless their home.

Cleveland Wilmore has the happiest wife in the world, and when she goes with him on his trips,

strangers think them bride and groom.

Wilmore's name is to-day written within the halls of fame and often says that Madge inspires his pen.

Their beautiful home adorns a wood-land dell in the city limits of Lexington—where luxury, loyalty, flowers and love make it a paradise.

May God send happiness to every home—be it cottage, cabin or palace.

The end.

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